



PARENT RESOURCE

MODIFIED GROUNDING

Written by Kristin Zolten, M.A. & Nicholas Long, Ph.D., Department of Pediatrics, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
Artwork by Scott Snider

Many parents use grounding as a discipline technique with their older children. However, when parents ground their children for long periods (e.g., several weeks or more) it often loses its effectiveness because there is typically little incentive for children to behave well during the grounding. Also, when parents ground children for a long period of time, they often give in and reduce the length of grounding because of the restraints it places on the whole family. When this happens, children learn their parents won't follow through with the grounding they impose.

The modified grounding procedure described below involves brief and intense grounding but the child is allowed the opportunity to earn his or her way off grounding by completing a job assignment. This technique is most appropriate for older children (e.g., 10-16 year olds).

Develop a job list.

The first step in initiating the modified grounding technique is to sit down with your child and develop a list of 10-15 jobs that often need to be done around the home. Do not sit down with your child to start this procedure at a time when your child is about to be punished. Choose a time when your child is behaving well to discuss the technique and to generate a list of jobs. These jobs should not be chores that your child is expected to do on a regular basis. These jobs should take a significant amount of time to complete (e.g., at least 1-2 hours). The jobs should also be things that your child is capable of doing. Examples of such jobs include washing the windows in the house, cleaning out the garage, and cleaning the bathroom.

Write each job description down on an index card.

The next step is to write each individual job on a separate index card. This description should include a very detailed description of exactly what is required to do the job satisfactorily. For example, cleaning the garage would involve removing all objects from the garage, removing cobwebs on the ceilings, sweeping the floor, hosing/scrubbing the floor, and replacing objects in an organized and neat fashion. If some jobs are relatively brief, it is possible to combine jobs together so that all cards have a job assignment that will take approximately the same total time to complete.

Explain the procedure.

After this list has been generated, your child should be told that when he or she misbehaves to the degree that grounding is necessary, this new discipline technique will be used. Immediately after the misbehavior has occurred, the child will be told he or she is grounded and an index card will be picked at random. The child will be completely grounded until that job has been completed to the parent's satisfaction. For particularly significant misbehavior, more than one card can be drawn.

Define what grounding means.

Grounding is severe and means staying in one's own room (or an assigned room) except for attending school, eating meals, or performing chores. During grounding there should be no television, no video games, no radio or tape players, no other games/toys, no visitors, no telephone calls, no snacks, no reading materials except school books, and no outside social activities. If a family outing is scheduled, a sitter should be used so that the grounded child remains at home while the parents and other family members can still go on the family outing.

Explain the rules one time only.

It is critical that you not nag your child about the jobs to be done. The rules of grounding should only be explained to your child once.

Check your child's work.

After your child has completed the assigned job(s) he or she should come to you so that his or her performance can be checked. If the job has been done well, it is important to briefly praise your child for the job performance and inform him or her that the grounding is over. If the job has not been completed satisfactorily, briefly provide feedback to your child on the aspects of the job that have been done well and those that need additional work. Be specific in what additional work needs to be done. Try to handle corrective feedback in a matter-of-fact manner without nagging, lecturing, or becoming upset. Using this modified grounding procedure, your child earns his or her way off grounding. Therefore, your child basically determines how long the grounding will last.

Grounding may last anywhere from just a few hours to several days. If the grounding lasts more than several days, it is important to check to make sure your child is being appropriately grounded (e.g., they're not sneaking television/radio). This modified grounding procedure can be a very effective discipline technique for older children (e.g., 10-16 year olds). However, it is critical that parents also remember to frequently praise and give their children positive feedback when they are behaving well. As with any punishment technique, grounding will only be optimally effective when there is a positive and loving relationship between parents and their children.

www.parenting-ed.org